

Rising From The Dirt by fauxguernica

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: AIDS crisis, Fluff and Angst, Homophobic Language, Internalized Homophobia, M/M, New York in the 80s, Period-Typical Homophobia, Post Season 2, Racial slurs, The most self indulgent piece of trash I've ever produced, billy grows as a person, flaming homosexual billy, hairdresser!billy, sad boi steve, steve has trust issues after nancy, transphobic slurs, yeah billy loves madonna, yeah billy runs away to new york

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Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington

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Summary:

It all starts with Billy Hargrove showing up at Steve Harrington's doorstep in the middle of the night, punching a wall and telling him he loves him.

Title is from Redemption by David O'Dowda.

1. Chapter 1

Summary for the Chapter:

With twenty dollars and a half pack of Marlboro reds in his pocket, Billy Hargrove was ready to leave Hawkins for good.

It was a snowless night in Hawkins, Indiana, late January of 1985. A blue Camaro was parked in the middle of an empty football field, the windows rolled down and metal blasting on the radio. Billy Hargrove was getting drunk alone on his 18th birthday.

God he was pathetic, he thought as he took another swig of cheap booze he'd found in the kitchen. He'd get in trouble for that later, get smacked probably. He didn't care. Right now his throat was burning and his head was spinning, and when he looked up he saw stars, lots of them, and it was real fucking pretty.

As much as Billy loved pretty things, pretty things and pretty boys, right now he couldn't stand looking at anything good. He closed his eyes and saw Steve Harrington, beaten and bloody and still so goddamn beautiful, lying unconscious on the floor beneath him, his body breaking more and more with every hit of Billy's fist.

Billy stared at his knuckles that were still fucked up from the dirty fight two months ago. He could have killed him. He felt sick, no – he felt like a fucking monster.

Nothing had stayed the same after that night at the Byers'. Before he used to get high on pissing people off, fucking them up, hurting them – making them feel like he did. Maybe then they could understand him, could see him. They never could.

Except Harrington. Those eyes saw through the pain and through the bullshit, made Billy feel naked under their gaze, saw him, the real him that even Billy himself couldn't reach. When Harrington was looking at him, Billy felt like he was someone. Now he felt invisible, like he didn't exist at all – all because Steve Harrington had stopped looking.

He wasn't stupid, he knew what this was. He'd felt like this before, and it had ended ugly and Billy swore he'd never let himself wide open and out of control like that again. He wasn't good at these kind of things. He was good at being an asshole, giving a beating and taking one. See, violence – it was easy. He understood violence. Love on the other hand, love was terrifying.

The realisation hit Billy like the empty bottle hit the ground – there was nothing for him here. He didn't belong in this yuppie conservative little town full of model citizens and he never would. This place was killing him, slowly. He had to get away or he would die trying.

Billy started the car, ignoring the dizziness. He wasn't nearly as drunk as he'd like to be but that didn't matter. He was getting the hell out of here. Tonight.

But first he needed to see Steve Harrington.

With twenty dollars and a half pack of Marlboro reds in his pocket, Billy Hargrove was ready to leave Hawkins for good.

He thought about Harrington while he was driving too fast on an empty road. What would he even say to him? What *could* he say? Billy was good at writing words down, carefully planting his thoughts on a paper where he could save them, come back to them once they were gone from his mind. But speaking them was next to impossible. He found himself being too brash, too rude, too awkward when he had to improvise – he would always pick the safe role as an aggressive asshole. That wasn't really who he was, Billy told himself, but each day it became harder to convince himself so.

Maybe he should write him a letter.

No, there was no time. There were already town lights ahead of him, and soon he passed the diner and the movie theater, the school and

the library, the police station, to find himself at the beginning of a disgustingly nice street full of disgustingly prestigious houses. Of all places in this shitty town, this had got to be where Harrington lived.

After roaming the street for half an hour, rich assholes' surnames burning in his already sick head, he slammed his hands on the steering wheel and cursed. A moment ago everything was spinning – it had felt like he was in a fistfight, the rush of adrenaline setting his skin on fire, blood thumming in his head, the thought of Harrington stinging in his chest. Now he was just exhausted. He could feel alcohol slowly leaving his system and reality closing its fingers around his throat.

You need to tell him that you love him or you'll never be free. You'll never move on. Never amount to anything, never become anyone.

He lit up a cigarette with shaky hands. He had to do this. He took a few drags, and with a muttered *Fuck it*, got out from the car.

The door of a random house he picked opened and there was a middle aged man who looked like he'd just woken up. He stared at Billy frowning.

"Son, you aware it's midnight? Everything alright? What do you want?"

"Honey, who is it?" a woman's voice yelled from the house.

"I have a delivery for Mr. and Mrs. Harrington, sir", Billy said, trying to sound as cheerful as he could. "I'm very sorry for the late visit, I'm sure my boss will cover it for you somehow. You're Mr. Harrington, I presume, sir?"

"You got the wrong address, son. Harringtons live two blocks away, it's a white house, has a swimming pool if I recall. I don't think they're in town though, but their son, Steve."

"Thanks", Billy grinned like a maniac and turned his back to the guy, throwing a half burned cigarette on his lawn.

His heart beat so fast that it hurt.

Billy was going to throw up, or pass out, or both. He pulled out the last cigarette, and without lighting it got out of the car. The car door slammed behind him as he started walking towards the house. *It's showtime.*

While he was looking for the right house, it had started snowing. He had snow in his hair and down his collar when he knocked on the door, a bit too aggressive. *Dammit, fuck.* It was cold and gross he was getting angry, angry about getting angry, and anxious about fucking everything up just like he always did.

The door stayed closed.

Billy knocked again, now harder, and again, and again. Nothing.

"Dammit, Harrington, open the fucking door, I know you in there, you faggy son of a bitch!" he yelled at the top of his lungs and gave the door a good kick.

That's it. He had fucked up. Harrington would never open that door now. Billy would never see him again. Harrington would never find out that under all the bullshit there was a killing desire and so much affection. And maybe it was good this way.

Tears burned his eyes as he sat down on the porch and buried his head in his hands. He felt weak and pathetic as the quiet sobs shook his core. He was crying like a bitch, as his dad used to put it. Like a disgusting little faggot that he was. Good, this was good. He deserved this.

The door opened with a rustle and there was light coming out of the house. Billy saw his shadow on the ground, and also another shadow of a boy behind him. The snow was falling and casting its own shadow. It looked beautiful.

"Hargrove? What are you doing he- are you- are you...crying?"

Hearing his voice made Billy's heart ache. That warm, concerned voice that he could listen to all night. He didn't respond. He was sure that if he opened his mouth, something horrible would come out of it. So he just sat, in silence, and stared at Harrington's shadow behind his own.

Harrington sighed. The door closed, the light was gone.

It was getting cold. Billy had lost track of time of how much he sat there, on the Harringtons' porch, freezing his ass to death. Death. That didn't sound so bad at the moment. Maybe *he could* literally freeze his ass to death if he tried to. After all, he was a sucker for dares.

He thought the rustling behind the door was a product of his own imagination, but then the door was opened – opened and closed again, and he felt something heavy and soft being put on his shoulders. A winter jacket, a jacket that felt like a blanket and smelled of shaving cream and hairspray.

"Here, take this, you must be freezing", said Harrington sitting next to him and handing him a steaming cup that smelled like chocolate. "It's just hot chocolate, there was some left, and I already had mine so..."

Billy took the cup from his hands, fighting the urge to linger against Harrington's fingers a little longer. "Thanks", he said, still not looking at him. The cup felt like a warm bath in his hands, and for a moment he was almost happy, having Harrington's girly smelling jacket on his shoulders and a cup of fucking chocolate in his hands and Steve Harrington beside him, staring at him intently.

They sat like that for a moment, Billy drinking from his cup and Harrington not saying a word next to him. There was a road in front of them, some lights in distance and a forrest of some sort; snow was

still falling and the air felt like electricity. As he placed a now cold and empty cup on the porch next to him he cleared his throat. He felt Steve turn his eyes to him.

"Been thinkin'." He lowered his eyes to the ground, ashamed of how vulnerable he sounded. He was trying to think of how to say what he was about to say – and what was he even about to say? And- and was Harrington wearing *fucking house slippers? Oh my god.*

"Thinkin' about everything. And I, uh, wanted to say that I'm sorry. For the way I treated those kids, the way I treated you. None of ya deserved it. And I wish I could take it all back but I can't."

Harrington stayed quiet, so he continued.

"I'm leaving this shithole tonight. So I guess this is also a goodbye, Harrington. Don't miss me too much, pretty boy."

Fuck. He had to say it, didn't he. Billy cursed himself for being so damn insecure that he had to ruin every rare good moment in his life by saying shit like that.

Harrington still wasn't saying anything and Billy couldn't help but look at him.

The sight of him made Billy feel like he was drunk again. Harrington was so damn beautiful. Even with his hair a total flat disaster, some toothpaste on his chin and in oversized pajamas he looked like a fucking angel. He had a frown on his face, that pretty face with a nose a little too big and those lips, God those lips. Billy found himself staring at them shamelessly.

And that's when he decided, to hell with it. He will never have this anyway, he's got nothing to lose. So he blurted out one thing he'd never said out loud ever before.

"God, I'm so in love with you."

Billy was expecting Harrington to punch him. To leave. What he wasn't expecting was Harrington looking at him like his fucking heart just broke and he was about to cry from pain.

"Don't say shit you don't mean. I don't care if you're drunk or high off your ass on drugs, Hargrove, but you will *not* say like things like that to me without meaning them. What do you want? To beat me up again? To fuck? Well, you're free to do either, hell, you're free to do both. But don't you *dare* say that you love me and not mean it."

He stood up to leave and Billy grabbed his wrist. "Steve."

"Get the fuck off me!"

Billy tightened his grip on Steve's wrist and twisted his arm so he could look him in the eyes. "I mean it. I swear. I'd rather off myself than hurt you ever again."

"You're hurting me right now", Steve said, defeated anger in his voice, and yanked his arm away. Billy hadn't realised the power of his grip.

"Sorry."

Steve rubbed at his wrist, looking so damn miserable. Billy wanted to reach out, hold him, kiss the little white scar on his temple that he had no doubt was his handiwork. He felt frozen, and disgusted with himself as he stared at Steve getting up and heading towards the house.

He was expecting to hear the door open and close behind him but the sounds never came. He turned around to see Steve standing between the door and himself as if torn apart by the two outcomes of the situation – he could either turn around and face Billy or he could walk inside that house and forget that anything ever happened. Steve took a step towards the door. Billy's heart sank.

"Don't forget your jacket", he said, trying to keep his voice from breaking. He stood up and stripped the jacket, feeling its owner's scent one last time before turning around and handing it over.

"Here-" he was cut off by Steve's mouth on his and hands holding his face, and almost stumbling to the ground because he was practically tackled.

"Plant your feet", Steve murmured against his lips before kissing him again.

Now, kissing guys had always felt amazing but this, this was something different.

Harrington was everywhere, in his gut, under his skin – his touch felt like fire, a fire that was burning up all the shit Billy's soul was carrying around, burning everything, leaving nothing but what really mattered.

Like this.

Just as he was pulling away, Billy brought his palms to his face, too fucking gently, and pulled him back in, kissing him so deeply, so slowly, and as softly as he could, and he could swear Harrington was fucking *trembling* in his arms.

He felt the tips of his fingers getting damp. Instead of breaking apart he wiped the tears with his thumbs from Steve's face.

When they broke apart they stayed close, foreheads touching, just breathing, and it was so strangely, overwhelmingly intimate that Billy couldn't speak, couldn't think, just feel.

"Come with me", he whispered, breathlessly, planting little kisses across Steve's tear-stained face. "Come with me."

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm a slut for comments so pls

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

"Come on", Billy said, hating himself for how pleading he sounded, how vulnerable, how weak.

"There's so much I wanna show you, baby. So much I wanna see with you."

"Billy, wha- I- I don't...Where- where would we even go?"

"Ever seen the ocean, Harrington?" Billy grinned, unusual fondness to his expression. "Fuckin' Cali, man. You'll love it. And it's so fucking warm there, more sun than you've probably ever seen in your whole life in this fucking North Pole. And the city, ah fuck, the city, there's so much life and interesting shit there, you won't believe." His smile fell as he realised Steve was not looking at him anymore, he was looking past him, a numb look to his face. "Hey, look at me", he said, voice quiet, and touched his jaw gently, making Steve stare at him, sad and tired. Billy swallowed. He thought about his next words carefully as he continued:

"And um, there's uh...people like me. Like us, you know... We could be- we wouldn't have to- you know, we could be-"

Billy couldn't breathe. His lips were dry and he couldn't move them. Just a moment ago he'd felt like everything was possible. Now he could only feel his stupid, naive excitement thicken into the most desperation he'd ever felt, mixing with a very familiar feeling of shame, as he watched Steve's expression change from unhappy to utterly mortified.

Steve closed his eyes and let out a long sigh.

"Come on", Billy said, hating himself for how pleading he sounded, how vulnerable, how weak. "There's so much I wanna show you, baby. So much I wanna see with you."

Steve just shook his head slowly, eyes on the ground. "I can't. I'm sorry but I just... can't."

Billy took a step back and turned away. He couldn't look at Steve. If he looked at him he would break; wouldn't be able to hold back tears and would end up crying in front of Harrington for the second time during the fucking night. "I understand."

"Billy, it's not what you think it is--"

"THEN WHAT THE FUCK IS IT?!"

Harrington had fucked with his head. Had made him feel wanted, just for a moment to fucking demolish him the next. Billy's head felt like a house on fire, as he started to lose control, hot tingling itch was spreading rapidly from his arms to his fists. Blood boiled behind his eyes, everything was soaked in red. As he looked at the terrified figure of a scrawny boy in front of him, the boy suddenly had no face. No name. He was talking, no, yelling something that Billy couldn't hear past the buzzing sound in his head, and he didn't care because right now – he wanted to kill him.

Billy took a step forward, raising his left fist. There was a sound of bones breaking as the hand was smashed against the concrete wall of the Harringtons' house.

The pain came after, and the blood, and Steve holding him up with his body as Billy's head rested in the crook of his neck, his legs almost giving up, his mind fading to black and back again. He was saying something, yelling and whispering, sounding hysterical but Billy still couldn't hear him over the buzz in his head.

The only words he could recognize from Harrington's frantic speech was "hospital" and "why", to what he could only respond before passing out:

"It happens...to me. Sometimes. Didn't...didn't wanna hurt ya."

He'd never driven so fast in his life. Billy's right hand gripped the

steering wheel knuckles white while his left hand, his good hand, laid limply beside him. There was blood on the leather of his precious Camaro, and normally Billy would flip at the mess but right now his mind felt like a black hole, numb to everything but pain in the broken bones.

Billy reached for a pack of cigarettes with his only functioning hand, resulting in the car jerking violently on one side of the road, tires seering on tarmac, sounding like some wild thing being tortured. His sore throat hurt from laughing. What a fucking night, man, *what a fucking night*.

Stopping the car, he reached into his pocket, only to find a crumpled and empty pack. Fuck. He really needed a smoke. And booze. He had no idea where he was, or if he was even going in the right direction. Looking around he saw nothing but forrest and empty, white glowing fields. Fucking Midwest. There must've been a gas station somewhere, or another yuppie town, where he could get his nicotine and maybe clean the mess that was his fucked up hand. Billy started the car. The car didn't move.

Shit. He tried again – nothing.

After an hour of cursing and turning around every detail (but mostly cursing) he came to a simple conclusion that he had, in fact, run out of gas.

This could not be happening. Not to him, not now. What the hell was he supposed to do now – walk to Cali? Walk back to fucking Hawkins?

Going back wasn't an option. Sitting on his ass wasn't an option either – he was too close to town, they'd come looking for him as soon as he was noted missing; which would be soon, very soon, and when he'd get dragged back to his father's house his hand wouldn't be the only piece of him bleeding.

And then there was Harrington. A part of Billy wanted to punch something again, another part wanted to cry like a kicked puppy.

Gritting teeth and feeling like shit, Billy Hargrove did the only thing

he could do – without looking back at his beloved car he began to walk to California.

"I'll take a coffee, black, and a pack of Marbs, red, thanks. Also, miss, you mind telling me where we standin' on the map?"

"Another runaway, huh."

The old waitress seemed completely immune to his honeyed voice and grin as she poured his coffee into a cup and tossed the pack of cigarettes on the counter. "Four fifty."

Billy cleared his throat and the waitress glared at him. "Pennsylvania's 5 miles away, kid. Don't get lost."

He almost dropped his coffee. He'd gone in the wrong direction after all. And his fucking car was standing in the middle of the road about 5 miles away.

The cup made a clunking sound on the table as he sat down and lit a cigarette. There weren't anyone at the diner except for him and some noisy couple bickering about some shit with a strange accent. He didn't realise he was staring until they both turned to look at him. He looked away, not being in the mood for talking.

He hadn't realised how tired he was until his eyelids felt heavy. His legs hurt from walking and his hands were burning from the hours spent in the cold. With the seats feeling like quicksand, warm smell of hotdogs, strange words across the room and a memory of Steve Harrington's lips, Billy fell asleep.

"Cherry, get your ass back in the car. Stop grilling him like that, 's creepy."

"But he's so cute! Look at them eyelashes, Benny, they're longer than mine!"

"For the love of-

"Shut up! He's waking up!"

Billy opened his eyes and almost screamed. The couple he'd seen the moment ago across the diner was now all up in his face, or the woman was, the guy stood behind her, frowning. She was not older than thirty, wide lipstick smile on her face, little black curls falling in a cascade from her shoulders and almost touching Billy.

"Sorry, dahlin', didn't mean to startle ya. We thought you was taken sumthin', passing out like that. You alright, dahlin'? Need a ride?"

"Yeah. I could use a ride. Thanks." He sounded like his throat had been scrubbed with sandpaper. He looked around; it was brighter than before, there were more people and his coffee stood untouched beside him, probably cold and bitter. Billy's neck hurt from falling asleep against a wall. He flinched as he accidentally leaned to stand up on his injured hand.

Billy thought about his car as he walked out the doors. He didn't remember where he left it, it could've been towed away by now, or found by the Hawkins cops. The thought of going back made him nauseous, and as much as he loved his car... in no fucking way he'd be going back to get it.

He lit a cigarette, sharing a fire with Cherry, as the girl had introduced herself. In roughly two minutes that they'd known each other Billy felt like she'd spilled him her entire family history, meanwhile as her friend, Benny, a scrawny guy with olive skin and dark, slipped back hair, stayed quiet and kept shooting Billy suspicious looks.

"Not gonna steal your girlfriend, pal", Billy sighed, cigarette between teeth as he was leaning against Cherry's white Ford that had probably

been white once. Benny averted his gaze, clearly embarrassed. Billy turned to Cherry. "So how long you two birds been together?"

"Na. We're no couple", she said, pulling out a pair of sunglasses and getting into the car. "Benny's queer."

Benny turned to her in the driver's seat, hissing: "Will you shut your ratchet mouth?!"

"S cool. I'm queer too."

Both of them turned to stare at Billy agape.

"Looks like you owe me five, Cher", Benny muttered as he started the car. "Told'ya I can tell."

Sorry, she mouthed to Billy in the backseat.

As they drove off, the radio was blasting with some sugary pop song to which Billy found himself getting in a really good mood. *Cause we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl.* He didn't even notice mouthing along with the lyrics until Cherry turned around in her seat and yelled over the radio:

"You like Madonna, Billy?"

Billy froze. Boys were not supposed to like this kind of music. Boys were not supposed to like... other boys. But they did, and he did, and fuck if it didn't feel amazing to admit.

"This is a good song!" he yelled and laughed, snickered, as Cherry turned the volume higher and did some dramatic lipsyncing, getting wrong about half of the lyrics.

"You's coming to the right place, hon", she said when the song was ending.

Just then it hit Billy - he'd no idea where he was going with this pair of weirdest, probably most interesting people he'd met in a long time. "Shit. Where we going, exactly?"

Cherry smiled behind her sunglasses as another song was starting to

play.

“New York City!”

Notes for the Chapter:

sorry it took me forever to write the second chapter,
please tell me what you guys think!

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

"No means no. We are not risking opening that thing for the sake of knowing where Billy Hargrove is. I'm sorry, kid. It's just too much of a risk."

They'd found his car two days later, empty, on a highway somewhere near the state border. The rumors were wild; some claimed he was kidnapped, the others went as far as to say Billy Hargrove had killed someone and was fleeing from the government.

Steve hadn't been sleeping well for months – the images of unspeakable horror were lurking in the back of his head every time he was drifting into unconsciousness. Now the monsters from another dimension were accompanied by the images of Billy's blue lips and glassy stare, his lifeless body all blood and frost lying somewhere in the woods of Indiana. He would wake up shaking and sweating, with a wet pillow and anxiety of not knowing, not being able to do anything.

He was graduating in five months – he was supposed to be looking at college applications, go to parties, work out. Not to sit in his room all by himself, staring out the window and not seeing anything, feeling hopeless, feeling afraid, missing things he never had and would probably never experience, given what a fucking loser he really was, in contrast to everyone's expectations.

It was the truth. Whether he wanted or not, he had to face the reality: he wasn't smart enough for college. (Hell, he wasn't even athletic enough for college.) There was nothing he was particularly good at, except for maybe driving and babysitting a bunch of kids from time to time (kids loved him, and their company did wonders to his self esteem, he noticed). No wonder Nancy had been disappointed; unlike him she was smart, observant, had seen past his mediocrity and realized she needed more. He wasn't angry, just hurt.

After all he'd almost believed he was worthy of love until he saw that, well, he wasn't.

And then Billy Hargrove had showed up to his doorstep, called him a faggot and told him that he loved him. Was in love with him. Held him with such tenderness, kissed him the way he'd never been kissed, looked at him like he was something beautiful, asked him to run away with him.

And it had hurt so much, allowing himself to believe for a moment that this was real, that he wasn't being lied to, that someone truly wanted him. And not just someone but Billy Hargrove, a boy from California who wore his beauty like a cruel mask, who radiated energy and emotion and heat, who made Steve's head and lungs empty whenever their eyes locked.

Steve wasn't that clueless – he was very aware of the effect he had on Billy as well. He'd seen the way Billy licked his lips as he stared at his naked torso in the shower, tried his best to ignore the suggestive flirting. Billy seemed like a guy who would fuck you and toss you aside like a used napkin, and Steve used to be just like that. But now everything was different, he was different, and if he was about to fuck someone it had better mean something. And he didn't need his heart broken again, and definitely not by Billy.

God, he didn't even know him. Getting to know Billy, the real Billy, was something he'd never think he would want, and now it was the only thing he wanted. He'd seen the ugly in him. Now he wanted to see the good.

If he ever got to see him at all.

A month passed. The snow started to melt, days got longer, kids were happier. All except one.

Max. Billy's little sister.

Ever since Billy left, the change in her was impossible not to notice. Steve only knew as much as Dustin and his own eyes told him, and

what he knew was that:

First, nothing changed. Well, Max was clearly relieved by the absence of her brother. All the things Billy stopped her from doing, she could do now. She could hang out with her friends as much as she pleased, could even bring them home. Could hold hands with Lucas on the couch without the fear of Billy storming in and trying trying to kill the boy simply because of his skin color. Claiming he was 'protecting' her. Bullshit. Protecting from whom? Could try and protect her from himself first, racist asshole.

After a couple of weeks Max had broken off with Lucas. Shortly after she'd stopped hanging out with the party, first not coming to the boys' D&D nights, then ignoring them altogether. She got into fights, talked back at adults, cut her hair unacceptably short. Every day she looked angrier, and her wrists were often smeared with ugly purple and grey. It was like Billy Hargrove had turned into a little girl and returned to Hawkins.

One day she was gone. Had been sent to another school, they said. An all girl Christian disciplinary school in West Virginia. No one knew the name of the town or the school.

The day they'd gotten the news, they were hanging out in the Wheelers' basement, everyone unusually quiet, uncomfortable silence falling in the room every so often.

Suddenly Eleven spoke, breaking one of those silences.

"Max was hurt. Her papa. Hurt her like he hurt her brother."

Everyone's head turned in her direction.

"How do you know?" Mike asked, sitting next to her. "Did you...see it?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean 'like her brother'?" The eyes turned to Steve now. "Are you saying he used to hit Billy?"

El nodded. "Yes."

"Are you fucking kidding me?! Max's been sent to some prison camp, God knows where and we're worrying about that son of a bitch who tried to fucking kill us? Steve, what the hell?"

"Calm down, Dustin-"

"No, you calm down, Steve", the boy said mockingly drawing out Steve's name. "El", he said turning to Eleven, "Can you use your awesome mind powers to get us to talk to Max, or see what she's up to, can you?"

"Hopper says it's not a good idea", Mike said. "Says the gate might open or crack if you keep poking on it."

"I can try-"

"El, no! Weren't you listening? It's too dangerous, you could-"

The kids kept arguing but Steve wasn't listening. He just sat there in an armchair that looked like it was made out of an old lady, and wanted to yell at himself for having been so goddamn dense. Worrying about Billy for an entire month when there was a little girl in front of him that could find anyone in a matter of seconds by just looking at their picture.

"Guys, it's getting pretty late, anyone need a ride home?" he said, and followed a bunch of depressed middle schoolers to his car. He would drop them off first, and then he would drive home to dig up his yearbook under his bed or wherever he'd tossed it. And then he would drive straight to Chief Hopper's.

"No means no. We are not risking opening that thing for the sake of knowing where Billy Hargrove is. I'm sorry, kid. It's just too much of a risk. There are other ways to find-"

"Please. I wouldn't ask you this unless it was very important to me."

"Weren't you and Hargrove high school enemies or something? Why do you care about him?"

"Because I just do."

"Not good enough, kid. The answer's still no."

"Love." Eleven suddenly poked her curly head out the door frame.
"You love... Max's brother."

Hopper's eyebrows shot up. The look on his face was a mixture of shock and amusement. "This true?"

"I don't- I don't know. Look, I just- I just care, okay? It's got nothing to do with any kind of... that sort of... feelings. I just want to know if the asshole's okay, alright?"

"Steve. Friends don't-"

"Friends don't lie, I know, El, I know." He ran fingers through his hair and sighed in exasperation. "It's... it's complicated, okay?"

"I want to help."

Hopper massaged his temples, looking like he was regretting every life choice he'd ever made.

"How many times do I have to-"

"I want to help!"

As Hopper opened his mouth to say the final word, a lightbulb exploded in the kitchen, leaving the room dark. Him and Eleven stared at each other as Eleven wiped her nose, and Steve felt like running away from the upcoming family drama. He was about to start apologising and planning a swift escape when Hopper sighed in defeat.

"Fine. But if anything – anything – goes wrong, I swear I'm going to-"

Eleven beamed and hugged him tightly, before taking Steve's hand and leading him to the living room.

"Picture."

She was sitting on the couch now, looking dead serious. Steve nodded and pulled the yearbook out of his backpack, browsing it clumsily with one hand until he found the right page. Hargrove, Harrington. Their pictures were almost next to each other, with some dude called Harmbutt squeezed in between. Harmbutt. Steve snorted.

"That's him", he said sitting next to her and pointing at the picture.
"That's Billy."

He tried to ignore the ache Billy's smiling face caused him. Looking at the picture he hadn't realized Eleven had closed her eyes and was now frowning in concentration.

"I see him."

Steve's heart sped up. "Is he okay?"

Eleven nodded, and he signed in relief. He was not expecting what she said next:

"Girl. Long hair. Pretty."

He froze.

"Smiling. Touching... hair."

Steve felt like he was kicked in the chest. Billy with a pretty girl, smiling, touching her hair. Shouldn't come as such a shock to him, after all it was Billy they were talking about. Shouldn't even concern him who he was with. Shouldn't hurt like this.

Hopper must have seen the look on his face because next he said:
"Okay, kiddo, that's enough. Let's cut it out, come on."

After thanking El and Hopper he drove home, where he told his parents he wasn't feeling well and went straight to bed. There weren't any nightmares this time, no monsters, not scenes of Billy lying dead. Just nothing.

Nothing until someone was knocking on his door and calling his name.

"Steve, honey, there's someone on the phone for you! I told him you were sleeping but he was so persistent. And charming! Steve? Steve!"

He looked at the alarm on the bedside table. Almost ten PM, Friday. He must've dozed off for a few hours. Groaning, he got up and headed downstairs.

"Hello." Steve tried not to sound like he'd just woken up and failed.

The low and raspy voice on the other line answered:

"Hey, Harrington."

Notes for the Chapter:

this was my favorite chapter to write so far ahhhh

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

Billy had been a strange fire that burned if you came too close. Dangerous. Erratic. Now he was a gentle flame, tamed between Steve's lungs.

Steve's voice cracked when he breathed out: "*Billy.*"

He felt drunk from the relief, the excitement twisting itself into worry in a mere second.

"You son of a bitch. How dare you do this to- do you have any idea how much I – fuck. Fuck you and your stupid, reckless ass, Billy." He ran a hand through the mess of unwashed hair, pulling on it in frustration. "They found your car, I thought- oh my God, and your hand... did you take care of it? Tell me you're taking care of yourself, and do you have money?"

He didn't realize he was out of breathe until he was gasping and Billy was laughing on the other side of the line, and it was not the usual mean cackling Steve was used to but a soft chuckle, with almost fondness to it.

"Jesus, Harrington, breathe. Everything's fine. I'm fine. The car broke down so I had to take a ride and leave it. Fucking sucks but it's just a car, so... I'm fine, I really am. I mean, could be better but 's good."

There was a sound of a car honking on the other side of the line followed by a hight pitched voice yelling. Steve thought he heard the word "asshole".

"Where are you? What's that noise?"

"In a piss smelling phone booth on Fifth Ave. And I'm pretty sure that was a prostitute missing a cab right there."

Steve's jaw dropped. "You're in... New York? I thought you were-"

"Going back to Cali, I know. I was. I mean, I am. Just need to save up

some money first. I'll give it a year if Cher doesn't kick me out. Oh, shit, wait a sec. Gotta put in another coin."

A memory flashed in Steve's head, an over exaggerated made up image of Billy with a woman. Now she had a name.

Blinding, burning jealousy mixed with an ache in the chest and a knot in the stomach had made him say stupid shit in the past, and this time wasn't an exception.

"So this is who Eleven saw you with", he blurted out, voice dripping with venom. "Touching her hair or something. Hope it was good. Real good."

For a moment there was nothing but some muffled traffic noises and his own breathing. Then there was a sound of Billy's voice, sharp and low and menacing.

"What. Did you just fucking say."

Steve wanted to cry. And curse his stupid mouth. "Nothing."

"Who the fuck is Eleven, Harrington."

"No one", he muttered and felt really mature. "Forget it."

"You hired a goddamn spy on me or some shit? Huh? Didn't take you for the desperate kind."

"I'm not- I didn't- shit. I'll explain later, okay? 'S not what you think. And it's not something I'd discuss over the phone." Steve felt like an idiot; and of course he had to embarrass himself even more by sounding small and insecure when he added: "You were with someone though, weren't you."

"You know what?"

This was it. He would call him a nosey fag, hang up and never call again.

"Fucking sue me for doing my friend's hair and makeup on our fucking night out, Harrington. You know, some people care about

appearance. And some of these bitches are hopeless with eyeliner.”

He sighed. Steve could feel him take a drag of a cigarette before he was lowered his voice and continued:

”Steve. I’m queer. Even if I were to stick it in a woman, chances are, the whole six minutes I’d be thinking about you.”

”And they say romance is dead, Hargrove. I’m swooning.” He tried to hide the smile behind his voice, ignore the warmth spreading in his chest. ”So you were...doing her hair?”

”Uh-huh. ’M good at it. Like, wicked good. Better than you’ll ever be.”

Billy told him how he had gotten into the city, how at first he had hated it – cold weather, cocky cops, crazy fucking people everywhere, the smell of rat piss in the streets, bagels, the subway, the language, and had he mentioned fucking bagels? He’d told Steve about Cherry who he’d moved in with since she desperately needed a new roommate after her last one got knocked up. He’d gotten a job at some storage and the pay was shit but it was enough to pay for a room and a half in the small Brooklyn apartment he shared with the girl that had saved his ass. He’d told Steve about the new people he’d met, the clubs he’d visited, the cool shit he’d seen in these overwhelming couple of weeks, and Steve could easily imagine the reflection of the city in a pair of bright, blue eyes.

They talked for what it seemed like half an hour, but when Steve’s mother had come downstairs to complain about the noise and they said reluctant goodbyes, the clock was well past midnight. They had talked for two hours, and Steve went to bed with a realization that the person he’d just had the longest conversation with in his life, was Billy Hargrove.

Billy called him every night from that on.

Each time his speech lost some of that West Coast slang and sometimes he used words Steve had to think twice about. But he sounded happy, and that was all that mattered. He'd tell Steve all about the crazy shit that happened to him in the city and Steve would tell him all about what was happening in Hawkins (which wasn't much). They spent so much time on the phone that Steve had insisted for him to be the one to call Billy. Which had proven to be an excellent idea, because sometimes when he called Cherry would pick up, and those were the opportunities to fish for information about Billy, the kind he'd never share. (Like that one time at the club when he mistook a 6'3 ft drag queen for Kim Wilde and freaked out, spilling his drink all over himself, or when he straightened his hair in hopes of looking like Axl Rose and instead looked just a bit like the crazy raccoon lady next door.)

"You and Nancy have been talking lots these days! How come she never visits?" his mom asked one evening while he was doing his math homework at the dining table.

"Hm? Nancy?"

"Well, who else?"

"Mom, Nancy and I broke up months ago. We're still friends but we don't really hang out outside school much."

Mrs. Harrington's eyebrows shot up. "If it isn't Nancy, then what girl are you talking to on the phone so often?"

"I'm talking to a friend. He lives in another state."

Silence fell in the room. "Well, you seem very close, honey", his mom said at last as she flashed him a worried smile. "How come your father and I have never met him?"

Maybe you would've met him last year when we had a fight so bad that my face looked like the girl's from The Exorcist for a month after but I'm glad you didn't, he wanted to say but instead he just shrugged and smiled.

"I don't know, mom. We didn't really become friends until he moved away, it's kinda hard to explain. But I really like him. Thinking about visiting him."

His mom nodded. She suddenly looked nervous as she fiddled with the watch on her wrist.

"Honey, I- I really wish your father and I could spend more time with you. I feel like a horrible mother for not knowing what's going on with you, I just wish... that you could talk to me if there's anything on your mind. If you want to... I really want to be a part of your life, sweetheart. And I'm sure your father does too."

Steve felt a sting in his chest at his mother's words. He doubted the last part of the speech but he got up nonetheless, and hugged her.

"It's alright, mom. I know. I don't blame you for anything. And I'm alright, I really am."

Standing there, in their dining room, hugging his mom, he realized that he, in fact was alright. He was graduating in two weeks. He was free to do anything. He thought about a piece of a notebook page lying in his desk drawer, a little piece of paper with an address scribbled on it. Two weeks. He could wait that long, how hard could it be?

But maybe just a couple of days wouldn't hurt anyone. He had enough money for two trips after all. He could afford to be impatient.

"I gotta go upstairs", he said, letting go and giving his mother a peck on the cheek. "Be right back."

Remembering the fight had trampled on his mood a little. He and Billy had never brought it up. In fact, they hadn't brought up much from the past. It was the future they mostly talked about, what they wanted to do and see, and there was an unsaid promise to it - Steve could feel it, and he was sure Billy could feel it too - the promise of someday doing all those things together. What they were, what they could and would be, it was all still unclear and unspoken but it was there, in his lightheaded mind, in his step as he ran to his room.

Billy had been a strange fire that burned if you came too close. Dangerous. Erratic. Now he was a gentle flame, tamed between Steve's lungs, and as he was dragging a suitcase from the closet (and dragging out everything else in the process, getting hit on the head by a snowboard and getting under an avalanche of old sweaters), he basked in the realization that yes, he had fallen for Billy Hargrove. Pretty damn hard.

The phone rang downstairs.

He stumbled in the kitchen and grabbed the phone before his mom could, smiling as he was sure of the caller's identity.

"Hello."

There was no answer. He repeated: "Hello?"

Still no sound. He was about to hang up when he heard low, heavy breathing.

"This Steve?"

His smile fell. The man's voice and the way he'd pronounced his name turned his blood cold.

"Yes", he managed to answer, "Who's- "

"Found my faggot son's diary today." There was a glug, a swallow and a thud. "You're dead, cocksucker."

Notes for the Chapter:

I fucking live for feedback so treat me well, hoes

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

If somebody had asked Billy a couple of years ago asked where he saw himself at eighteen, he'd probably think of prison. Or a morgue. Anywhere but this tiny room in this tiny apartment in this huge fucking city, angrily shaking his ass in front of the mirror to Into The Groove in a black satin bathrobe, damp mess of golden curls falling down his back.

If somebody had asked Billy a couple of years ago asked where he saw himself at eighteen, he'd probably think of prison. Or a morgue. Anywhere but this tiny room in this tiny apartment in this huge fucking city, angrily shaking his ass in front of the mirror to Into The Groove in a black satin bathrobe, damp mess of golden curls falling down his back.

He took a swig from a half empty bottle of Cherry's homemade punch, the only alcohol he'd found in the kitchen, the one bottle she'd told him not to touch. He knew she would be pissed when she got home, or even worse, concerned.

He didn't care. Tonight he was celebrating life and death.

**

The freaks come out at night.

Billy had seen his fair share of night life in San Francisco, but this, this was something different – these dirty, flashy streets that smelled like smoke, rat piss and hot dogs; streets filled with people willing to fuck, some of whom looked like they'd come from another planet; painted drag queens, leather daddies, trannies that didn't even try to cover their hairy legs and chests. And of course there were junkies –

and where there were junkies, there was the stuff.

They had been at their usual place, celebrating. See, after months of chickening out he had finally walked into that salon on 143rd Street and talked to the owner. A week later he had an apprenticeship. Of course this didn't mean he still didn't have to haul his ass to the warehouse every day – now he was just working part-time. Which his boss, an old fart who always looked like he smelled shit under his nose, was not happy about.

"So you's becomin' a barber, huh?" he had asked when Billy had come with the news.

"Yes, sir. A hairdresser, to be clear, 'm more interested in ladies' fashion. Startin' next Monday, sir."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever. I'll let you work here, just quit with the language. Ain't no fairies working in my storage."

Billy had been almost as excited to start his journey to become a hair god as he'd been about going out and getting absolutely fucked up.

After a dozen vodka shots and a couple of stripes in the bathroom Cherry had wanted to dance and gotten into a fight with her boyfriend, for probably the 15th time that day, throwing her drink all over his shirt, then disappearing somewhere together, probably back to their place to fuck. Billy had shared the left coke with a couple of Cher's friends before they took off as well, rejected a couple of dancing/fucking invitations, and eventually had found himself stuck with Benny.

Billy had disliked Benny from the very beginning – the guy seemed full of himself, lacked any sense of humor and seemed to always get in a shitty mood when Billy was around. Sometimes Billy would catch him staring with a sort of angry, apathetic expression, and when he'd return the stare, Benny would quickly turn away.

But Cher loved him, and she was good with people. If she was fond of someone it was a steady sign that the person wasn't a complete piece of shit. Billy had decided it was her he was doing this for, getting this asshole safely to wherever the fuck his cha-cha queen ass lived.

"Come on, 's gettin' late, I gotta work tomorrow", he'd said to Benny who had seemed to be even more fucked up than Billy, judging by the absent look on his face, completely devoid of emotion.

"Hey, come on." He'd shaken him, without a result. Cursing under his breath Billy had taken the guy's hand and dragged him through the crowded dance floor, out on the street. They'd taken a cab to his and Cher's, and as soon as the door had closed behind them, he'd guided Benny to the sofa and tossed him a blanket, muttering 'Night' and heading to his room.

As he was leaving, Benny had grabbed his wrist.

He'd tensed from the sudden contact. And then he'd been pulled on the sofa next to Benny.

"Look man, I'm fucking tired, I already told ya-"

He couldn't finish the sentence because the dullness in this strange boy's eyes had suddenly turned into the saddest, broken gaze. Billy couldn't help but pity him, letting him pull him onto the couch next to him, letting him bring a hand to his face, letting him kiss him. Billy had been too tired and bemused to stop Benny, and after a moment of frozen awkwardness, he'd been lazily kissing back. He'd felt a hand wander on his thigh and to his crotch, squeezing over washed out denim.

It had taken him seconds to realize what was happening. He'd pushed the hand gently away.

"Sorry, I can't. I have someone."

Benny had looked at him in that drunken haze, a smile hovering his lips.

"He's lucky to have you." Fingers had run through Billy's hair, lingered on his jaw. He had closed his eyes at the tender touch, feeling he could fall asleep right there. There had been lips on his again but the kiss had been a mere brush of mouths, soft and chaste. "So lucky", Benny had whispered.

Benny had put his head on his shoulder and seemed to have fallen

asleep. Billy had leaned against the couch frame, thinking how this had been the first time in his life that he'd turned down sex. For Harrington. When had he become such a pussy?

He had almost fallen asleep when he was jerked awake by Benny's voice, soft and quiet.

"I'm gonna die."

Eyes opening drowsily, he'd muttered: "What?"

"Last week. I got the results. I'm positive. They say I'm gonna die, Billy. In a coupla months, a year, maybe two, they don't know. But I'm gonna die."

Suddenly Billy hadn't been tired anymore.

He hadn't slept an hour that night, staying on that couch with his arm draped over quietly snoring Benny, thinking *What if I'm dying too*. Of course he'd known about the gay plague as they used to call it. Had heard and seen things that he would never forget. Had been afraid before but never like this, never dreading the heartbreak of someone else if something happened to him, never feeling guilty for not taking care of himself for the sake of someone he loved.

Billy had been afraid of losing Steve before. But he had never been completely fucking terrified at the thought of Steve losing him.

**

An excruciatingly slow week had passed.

He couldn't get tested right away since they'd have noticed the coke in his system. Billy had felt anxious and so fucking alone with this, he couldn't tell Cher without spilling about Benny and he couldn't tell Steve, since he didn't want him to worry. Steve was graduating in a week after all, he had shit of his own to deal with, didn't need to deal with Billy's too.

When the results came back negative he couldn't stop the tears. There was a mob outside the clinic when he walked out, protesters, with their huge white signs, loud as a zoo. One of them had approached Billy, handing him a pamphlet. 'Turn To God, Turn Away From Sin', it had written on the front.

"It's never too late to seek mercy, young man", the man had yelled over the protesters' uproar. He was smiling, friendly and casual. Something inside Billy had gone off. He'd remembered Benny's face a week ago, his words, his own panic about himself and about Steve – his Steve, his love, his baby – and he had lost control.

Before he could even realize what he'd done, he was being dragged away, knuckles red, the protester's mouth looking like a mushed piece of red velvet cake.

Here he was now, throwing the empty bottle on his bed, searching for his metal cassettes, realizing he didn't have any, when the doorbell rang. He groaned 'Piss off' to whomever was behind the door. The bell rang again. Billy turned up the music, the bell kept ringing, turned it louder, the ringing wouldn't stop.

He slammed the radio shut, stammered through the living room and opened the door almost ripping it from the frame, ready to tell whomever there was, to go stick a foot up their ass. He expected a neighbor complaining about the noise. Their landlord. Cherry's no-good, cheating dirtbag of a boyfriend.

Anyone but a tall boy with a suitcase and a shocked pair of brown eyes.

Notes for the Chapter:

another cliffhanger cause i'm an asshole!! :-)
(updating soon though, i'm on a xmas break) Thank
you so much everyone who's commented and left

kudos, that shit puts me in the best mood, i love yall
xxxx

6. Chapter 6

Summary for the Chapter:

There was a lot he didn't know about Billy.

- One week earlier -

"I don't know, Chief. You think it could've been a mistake? He did say my name, but it's a pretty common name, don't you think? So- "

Steve could hear Hopper muttering *jesusfuckingchrist* on the other side of the line.

"Okay, slow down", he interrupted Steve's nervous rambling. "Are you sure that there isn't *anyone* you could think of? Come on, kid, 's small town. Any male friends with overprotective, alcoholic fathers giving you aggressive good night calls?"

"Well... no. Isn't it your job to find out?"

"Watch it, kid. I-"

"Actually", Steve licked his lips in agitation and ran a hand through his hair, making it stand up. "There's Tommy Hanlon. I punched him in the face last year. He was pretty upset."

"Uh...huh."

"Oh, no, wait! Tommy H doesn't have a father."

And he didn't have any other friends than Tommy, Steve realized, at least none of his age, and Tommy wasn't even his friend anymore. Mr. Popular, ladies and gentlemen, King Steve.

King Steve.

"There's... Billy. Hargrove."

He could hear Hopper lighting a cigarette, and shit, didn't he need one too.

"Okay. I'll pay his old man a visit first thing in the morning. Now, if you feel unsafe I can always send somebody over for a couple of hours. You want me to send somebody?"

Steve thought about the spiked bat under his bed. "Think I'll manage."

"So, if the son of a bitch keeps calling or shows up, you call the station right away, got it? No monkey business, no playing a hero, man of the house, any that kind of crap, understand? Just call the station."

"Got it, Chief. Thanks."

"And may I ask – how in the hell you got my house number?"

Steve blinked a couple of times. "Uh, sir, you do have a daughter."

Hopper was quiet for a solid moment. "Damn right I do. Good night."

**

He didn't tell Billy about the phone call. From the defeated tone in his voice and the lack of insults Steve could tell something had been wrong lately, and this was another reason why he couldn't let Billy deal with this headache; *his* headache, his own stupid problems that were probably nothing compared to Billy's. He couldn't lie – knowing something was up with Billy was affecting him, was fucking *killing* him, and it's not like he could just ask if everything was alright unless he wanted to get an irritated "*Stop mothering me, Harrington*" for an answer.

What if it had been Billy's father calling him? Steve kicked the suitcase under his bed, feeling his anger grow like a rolling snowball. The man had mentioned a diary. Billy could never keep a diary. He

probably thought it was for losers and middle school girls, and writing about Steve of all things?

He let out an angry sigh and fell on his bed, staring at the ceiling, wanting to scream. It wasn't likely. But it was possible. He found himself stupidly hopeful at the idea.

After all, there was a lot he didn't know about Billy.

**

A week passed. No strange phone calls. No threats.

The whole thing started to feel surreal, considering how uneventful the following days turned out to be. Until the Friday morning he was pouring milk into a bowl of cereal with one hand and trying to pull on a sock with the other – that's when the doorbell rang.

Steve jumped at the sound, spilling milk on the counter, balancing on one foot and almost falling on his ass. He stumbled upstairs, grabbed the bat and headed back, walking down the staircase slowly, leaning onto the wall, the bat steady in his grip, watching the stranger's shadow shift through the painted glass.

The man was moving.

Then it was gone and there was a sound of receding steps, then a car's engine was getting started. The door flew open as Steve bolted out, hoping it wasn't too late to see the register.

He couldn't see the numbers but that didn't matter because he recognised the car immediately – it was Chief Hopper's deputy van.

What in the - Steve took a step forward and almost tripped over something. Down, next to his bare feet lied a package, wrapped in newspaper, not bigger than a book. He picked it up, turned it around, shook it – that's when something fell off. A note.

SON OF A BITCH WON'T CALL AGAIN. FIGURED YOU'D WANT THIS.

- HOPPER

Steve swallowed and looked from the note to the wrapped object in his hand. With shaky hands he started to tear it open, let the paper fall down on the porch with rustling sound.

It was a book, after all, and looked a bit like those kind of fancy address books Steve's dad owned, except this one's black leather covers weren't polished and shiny– they looked extremely worn out, edges crumpled, and instead of fresh paper smelled of cigarettes and overly sweet cologne.

Billy's diary.

**

Hardly readable boyish handwriting, short inserts. Rock concert tickets. Polaroids of his car. Raunchy descriptions of how he fucked someone. Bitching about Indiana.

That's how Steve had pictured Billy Hargrove's diary to be like.

Reading someone's diary was a huge invasion of privacy, and an overall low, shitty move. Steve felt like an absolute scumbag as he sat on the living room floor and turned to the first page. He had been right about one thing – Billy's handwriting was an incomprehensible cursive mess. Steve didn't know whether to feel relieved or disappointed.

As he continued browsing through the pages, the letters became clearer, the names and dates stuck out a lot – March 4th -84, May 27th, June 23rd... He had been right about the inserts too – they

were mostly short but one in particular caught his eye, it was the only writing on the entire page and it only took one line.

July 13th -84

This is all my fucking fault.

Steve stared at the words, a little smudged, a little too deep in the paper, looking like they'd been painful to write.

This was fucked up. This was private. He shouldn't be reading this. Steve knew that if he continued reading eventually he'd stumble upon something he really wouldn't want to see.

He turned the next page.

July 14th -84

Thought he was going to kill me. He could've. I swear. He could've. Called me a nigger lovin' faggot. Said if I ever pull this shit again my ass will be out on the street. Shit. Head hurts. He locked my door. Feel like I'm gonna pass o

The unfinished sentence was followed by an ugly streak of dark blue as the hand holding the pen had gone limp.

July 18th -84

Told Jake to meet me in our usual place. Told him what happened. Told him that we're moving. Cried like a fucking baby. He didn't say anything, just kissed me. We did it right there, no lube, no nothing. Woke up with his jacket around me, bleeding from the ass, his car gone.

Aug 27th -84

Sleeping in a motel tonight, sharing a room with the Red Devil. She hates it when I call her that, says it's even worse than Maxine. I don't know, I like Maxine. Not the little shitbird, the name. I could name my kid Maxine. Not that I'm ever getting any, I'm shit with kids.

Max's asleep. So is Dad and what's-her-name. It's dark, never gets this dark in San Fran. And there are no lights anywhere, no sounds of cars passing by, no nothing. It's too quiet. I can't sleep. I miss Cali and it's cold, and I can't sleep.

Dad says it's because we lived in Cali I turned out to be a fuck up. Says when we get to that fucking hillbilly town I'll get put into place. Finally learn some respect and responsibility. Traditional family values. Discipline.

Yeah, we'll fucking see about that.

Sept 7th -84

I think I saw an angel. He was wearing Ray Bans.

Don't remember much from the party but I remember him. Steve Harrington. He was there with some skinny bitch and left without her. I swear I could've fucked him right there and then in front of every idiot in that house. Never been this hard. Fuck.

Never knew in this cow shit smelling town you'd find something so beautiful. I remember in San Fran you could sometimes see flowers growing out of cracks of concrete in the streets, they'd be stomped out pretty soon but they always grew back. I wonder how hard this one needs to be stomped on to stop being so pretty. Shit, I'm not making any sense. Better go back to bed and sleep off this bitch of a hungover before Dad comes back.

Oct 23rd -84

Every song is about Harrington. Every. Fucking. Song.

Jan 8th -85

Max had his number written on a paper for Susan, just in case. I stole it. Been staring at it for like an hour now. Probably have memorized it by now. I'm pathetic.

Jan 24th -8 5

Don't think he hates me. Don't think he hates anyone. He's too good for that shit. Too kind.

Think he pities me. Thinks I'm a loser incapable of love. Maybe it's true.

Steve.

I want you in every way. Can still feel your fist hitting my lip. It felt like a kiss.

I'm burning for you, baby.

Jan 26th -85

It's my birthday. Dad forgot again.

**

"Good story you readin' there?"

"Excuse me?"

"I said", the man spoke slowly, gesturing to the old address book in Steve's hands. "Interesting book?"

Steve pulled on a polite smile. "Yeah. Very much so."

"Yes, yes. My daughter loves to read. Read everything, from yellow pages to toast recipes since learned how to. It's actually her and her husband I'm visiting. How about you, fellow? What are you flying to New York for?"

Steve looked out of the window, seeing only a mass of clouds. He turned back to the man, small genuine smile now hovering his lips.

"I'm in love."

Notes for the Chapter:

so yeah i guess billy was dating a black guy in

california... shocker

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

thanks to everyone who's left kudos & commented, it means so much <3 i've been dealing with a lot lately and english is not my first language, that's why it took so long to update but here we are! enjoy this chunk of a chapter (i'll try to make them longer from now on), this one's mainly fluff and billy's personal life, and the next one's gonna be more about the plot... (and smut. definitely.)

Billy couldn't move.

This was not supposed to happen like this. They were not supposed to meet again like this. Not with Billy being a drunken mess with bruised knuckles – again. Not with Steve looking at him like that. Again.

Except Steve wasn't looking at him with confusion and caution of a man dealing with an angry dog, like he had when Billy showed up on his doorstep months ago. Billy wasn't sure if he was high or dreaming because in no place or time Steve Harrington could be looking at him *like this*.

Like he couldn't believe he was there. Like Billy Hargrove was a fucking dream come true.

He'd imagined them meeting again countless times. He'd planned it all – meticulously even, in his head it was perfect. He'd pick him up from the airport, take him home, show him the city. Blow him away with his charm. Make Steve beg him to come back with him. *Make him stay*.

"I've always sucked at surprises." Steve let out a nervous laugh, running a free hand through his hair, stopping midway like he remembered he actually did something to it today. "Should've called, I'm sorry-"

Billy grabbed his hand, pulling him inside. "Get your ass in, Harrington."

The door closed and Steve was still holding onto his hand, with a dopey grin now, and Billy couldn't help but smile too, thinking that this wasn't what he'd imagined and it wasn't perfect – but it was real.

**

"Your hair's like, really long now."

"You jealous?"

Steve snickered before taking a careful sip from the mug.

"A little."

Half milk, three sugars. This guy really hated coffee. Billy drank his own black and bitter monstrosity, praying for his head to clear as fast as possible. He was stealing glances at Steve, who was stealing glances at him in return, thinking he was sneaky. It was fucking ridiculous, the way they were around each other, yet Billy felt like he'd never been happier than standing by the window in this tiny living room, looking at the street below and drinking shitty coffee with Steve Harrington.

"I don't think I've ever been this high", Steve said looking at the city behind glass. "Holy shit."

Billy almost choked on his coffee. "You're high?"

"The building, Billy. I was talking about the building." He was laughing and Billy felt like an idiot. But the way Steve's nose scrunched and his fucking smile made it worth it.

Then he got an idea.

"C'mon. Wanna show you something."

Climbing on rooftops was dangerous and forbidden - and Billy was a reckless fucker who didn't give a shit about the rules. It balanced out.

They'd climbed out the window in Billy's room and used the fire escape to get to the spot where there was a huge crack in the brick wall – from there it was easy to climb up on the roof.

The city was wrapped in dusk, air warm, the sky blue and orange smeared together. Muffled traffic sounds coming from down below, someone playing piano off key somewhere. An airplane flying above them, looking like a toy.

"That's Brooklyn Bridge over there", Billy said, leaning against the railing next to Steve. "And that's Manhattan. Looks even better at night. Shit, should've brought you here later. 'S fucking beautiful when it's dark."

"Yeah. Fucking beautiful."

He turned to look at Steve, expecting him to be staring mouth open at the sight in front of them, like he did the first time he climbed here. But Steve wasn't looking at the city. Steve was looking at him.

Billy turned away, heart racing like a motherfucker. He began digging his jeans for a pack of Marbs.

"Want one?"

As he took the first drag, the cigarette was pulled out of his mouth. Billy watched Steve take a drag himself, only he didn't. The cigarette was tossed on the ground unceremoniously, and there were hands gently holding Billy's face as he was being kissed.

There was no desperate clutching or wet cheeks this time. This time he could feel that Steve was happy – happy and confident in the way he smiled against his lips as Billy kissed back, and buried his hand

into his hair, wrapping the other one around him, pulling him closer.

"This is crazy. Think I'm going crazy", Steve whispered, shaking his head, looking as overwhelmed as Billy felt, eyes shining, mouth agape. He kissed Billy's cheek, the corner of his mouth, placed a kiss on his neck and nuzzled in like a little kid. "I'm going crazy and I love it. I love it. I love you."

Billy felt his heart stop for a moment, and then it was beating again, sore from the lightness and something he couldn't quite explain. It was getting darker and city lights were brighter. Steve Harrington had his arms around his neck. Billy was drunk, drunk, drunk all over again.

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"Shit."

"Is everything fine? I'd like to see-"

"No, shut up. I got this," Billy said concentrating on the blade sliding and closing around the chunks of hair, cutting it shorter and more uneven. "Ma'am", he added to be polite.

He'd been working on Mrs. Goldstein's bangs long enough for the hair to dry, and now her face looked like a groundhog had shed on it. Tiny brown hairs were sticking to her makeup and the bitch wouldn't stop moving her head. Also not only were these bangs almost at the hairline, they sprung up like grass. This was hopeless.

Mrs. Goldstein looked like she was about to cry.

"Oh my God, this is not- not what I wanted, oh my God-"

"I'll be right back."

He headed through the backdoor, receiving long looks from the women in the salon. (the *'If you burned my fucking hair to my scalp I'd say thank you'* kind of looks.) Most of them were over forty. They reminded him of Mrs. Williams back in Hawkins, poor woman – Billy knew what it was like to lust after forbidden dick.

His back hit the concrete wall as the hands searched for the lighter. He stood there, smoke in his eyes, the smell of conditioner on his hands and rotten cabbage in the next door Chinese restaurant's dumpster, all blurring together.

'Let's start with the basics, simple haircuts and blow-outs', they'd said. *'Na, I got this',* he'd said. *'I've got experience and I'm pretty good, think I'm a natural, really. Think it'd be best if I just jumped on the wagon, 's like throwing a kid in the lake, right? Sink or swim, you know?'*

Brushes getting stuck in damp hair, making fucking sections. Hair getting stuck in the blowdryer. Accusations. So what if he tried to glue the hair back, ever heard of hair extensions? Besides, anyone could make a mistake or two, especially during their first week. And it wasn't his fault that the fancy bleach they used at Stella's happened to look and smell exactly like the styling gel.

'You can't quit.' Cherry had looked at him over Carrie, for the first time during his fifteen minute rage episode in their living room. *'Look, Gina said not to tell you but they's had more customers since they took you. Trust me, they know you frontin', they just don't care. Just keep fucking up, dahlin', can't fuck up forever.'*

"Jesus, what's that stink? Those chinks keepin' bodies in there?"

Gina Morelli leaned on the wall next to him, lighting a cigarette. Billy would never admit but he was a little scared of her, the bitch was always angry and made Joan Jett look like a Heather. A dyke, one

hundred percent.

"Real talk, you gonna give me a reason why you were an hour and a half late, or do I have to listen to that half assed bullshit again?"

Billy sighed. "What's wrong with a surprise visit from my grandma?"

"Nothin'. Just wonderin', did your grandma give you that hickey as well?"

Billy couldn't hide the smile creeping on his face. The reason why he was late to work was that he'd forgotten the whole fucking universe when he'd passed out listening to a heartbeat in a preppy sweater and woken up to a stubbled cheek, thinking he had died and went to Heaven.

Then he'd seen alarm clock, unset, on the chair beside the bed.

"Fuck. Work!"

He got up too fast, earning himself a headache, and started looking for fresh clothes. Steve's eyes fluttered open. "Whas' goin' on?" He got up on his elbows, yawning.

"Needed to be at work an hour ago. Shit, could get fired for this. All your fault."

"M Sorry." He didn't sound sorry at all. "Don't go. Call in sick or somethin'. Stay with me." With that he plastered himself on the bed and gave Billy the most disgusting puppy dog eyes, accompanied by a sleepy wink.

"Cut it out, Harrington." He pulled on a shirt. "Want me to go to work late and horny?"

Steve became red as a firetruck at the comment, making Billy grin and bend to kiss him. "I'll take the rest of the day off, okay? Meet me at six at the end of the street, 's close to where I work. Don't get lost."

"Where are we goin'?"

"I'm taking you out of course", he mumbled against his lips. "It's true what they say apparently, you're either pretty or smart."

Billy wondered what Steve was doing right now. Probably getting up from bed, looking for his socks and finding Billy's extensive mascara collection instead. Or worse, the wig he wore once to the club. Maybe he took the spare keys Billy had given him and went out to buy a bagel. Maybe he was chatting with a stranger in a coffee shop right now, smiling like he'd had all night, happy and carefree and so fucking beautiful. Billy's heart ached at the thought of Steve here, in his city, and instead of being with him, he was here – stuck at work arguing with a nosy bitch of a coworker.

"Why do you care why I was late?"

Gina looked like she wanted to kill him. "I'm at the reception today, forgot, asswipe?! What am I supposed to write in, that the new guy was screwing someone when he had to be at work? On a Saturday, the busiest fucking day!"

"Whatever, honey." He stepped on his cigarette and headed towards the door, glancing at his seething coworker. "You'll figure it out."

"Choke on a dick, Hargrove!"

Billy checked himself out before returning to Mrs. Goldstein's poor forehead. "Oh, I'm gonna", he muttered, ass twitching in tight jeans, his reflection winking at him.

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There was one thing he needed to do before he could enjoy his day off, that being, taking the day off.

That being, stopping by the warehouse to kiss his boss's ass.

God, Billy hated the old bastard. Day by day he reminded him more of his dad, and whenever he was around, he found himself in a shitty mood. The only thing that made the job bearable were smoking breaks.

There was a guy, a real Italian beefcake called Tony, that he smoked and made fun of their boss with. Tony had real nice arms. And a face. Could say he was pretty. Billy felt strange thinking of him like that, especially now and it wasn't because the guy had a girlfriend – of whom he wouldn't shut up, you could tell the man was in love. It felt strange because Billy was in love as well. There was only one pretty boy for him. And he'd accepted that, even if Steve stopped feeling the same way, never burned for him like he burned for Steve, he'd always have Billy's little charcoal of a heart.

"What's good, Bill?" Tony pointed at the infamous hickey on Billy's neck. "Nice."

Billy grinned. "The old bastard's here?"

"Yeah, in the back room, why you smilin' like that? Happy about seeing the man?"

Billy glanced at the clock. Five minutes to six. "Y'know I am."

He checked the back room, the trucks, even the toilets – no sign of the bastard. It was already past six. Billy considered bailing and explaining later, decided to hell with it, and as he waved to Tony and closed the door behind him, ran into the person he least wanted to see now – his boss.

"I dropped my 'dog, you goddamn son of a--"

"I'm so sorry, sir." Billy looked at the pickle relish and mustard that had a moment ago been on a sausage and were now on his boss' shirt. He swallowed. "I know it's not a good time and all but, my uh, girlfriend didn't tell me she was coming, and she lives in Indiana so, if it's cool I'd like to take the day off. I'll make up for it later, hand on heart."

The man's eyes narrowed. He was still holding a mushed bun in his

hand, the sausage getting attacked by a bunch of cats some feet away. "You never said you had a girlfriend."

Billy was about to come up with something when he heard his name. He froze. It couldn't be.

"Billy!" Steve was all smiles when he jogged towards them. "Hey!"

Billy watched in horror as his boss eyed Steve suspiciously. "And who's this?"

"Steve Harrington, nice to meet you, sir." He offered his hand which the man shook reluctantly. "Just flew all the way from Indiana to see this guy." Billy felt a hand brush his waist, a gesture of affection he suddenly wasn't used to. Steve was smiling at him, he could feel it but he couldn't look at him, just... couldn't.

Uncomfortable silence followed. Billy stared at the gum in the crack in a pavement, feeling his boss's glare burn holes into his head.

"Something wrong?" Steve wasn't smiling anymore. He looked at the man and then back at Billy, confused.

"So this is your *girlfriend*, huh?"

It took Billy everything to look the man in the eyes. The tone, the look - right now it could've been Neil Hargrove standing in front of him and he wouldn't have known the difference. He didn't even notice his hands were shaking and balled into fists until Steve was stepping between him and his boss and Billy had to pull him back, stepping forward himself.

"Listen here, old man. I know what you're thinking. I know it and I don't give a rat's ass if you fire me right now cause I fucking quit. Now get the fuck out of the way if you don't want your sorry ass be kicked, cause I'm taking my fucking *boyfriend* and getting the hell out of here."

They walked in silence.

"Billy, I'm so--"

"No. Stop. 'S not your fault. Should've quit that shit job a long time ago."

"But what are you gonna--"

"Don't worry 'bout it. I'll find something."

Steve didn't respond and Billy tried to calm the turmoil inside, to comprehend what the hell had just happened and what the hell he just did.

"You called me your boyfriend."

Billy stiffened. He really had. "Does it- does it bother you?"

"No."

They still weren't looking at each other, stopping at traffic lights.

"Then is it okay for me", Steve said quietly and a little too fast, "to call you my boyfriend?"

Billy turned to stare at him. "Yeah", he breathed out, and couldn't help the boyish grin spread on his face. "Fuck yeah."

The sounds of car horns startled them both. They'd stood way past the green light. Some angry cab driver was yelling at them in broken English to cross the damn road, and Steve was giggling and grabbing Billy by the elbow and yanking them forward, jogging across the road. He was still holding onto his arm when they stopped, and Billy wished he could just take his hand in his, and kiss the fuck out of him right there in the middle of the street, not caring about people rushing past.

Instead he brushed his pinky against Steve's palm.

"You hungry? I know a great Italian place two blocks away."

Steve grinned. "Only if I can use my nose to roll meatballs your way like in that cartoon. And hold your hand behind a bread basket."